



Contact Tracing and Self-Isolation

Frequently Asked Questions

Note: Throughout this document we refer to ‘settings’ – this relates to educational and childcare settings, including early years settings, schools, children’s social care and further education (FE) providers.

Why don’t under-18s have to self-isolate and won’t this spread Covid in education settings?

The government continues to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. We have moved away from stringent restrictions on everyone’s day-to-day lives, towards advising people on how to protect themselves and others, alongside targeted interventions to reduce risk. As COVID-19 becomes a virus that we learn to live with, there is now an imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people’s education - particularly given that the direct clinical risks to children are extremely low, every adult has been offered the opportunity for 2 doses of the vaccine, and all children aged 12 and over are now eligible for vaccination. Our priority is for settings to deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to all pupils. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health. There continues to be a range of protective measures in education settings, including regular asymptomatic testing, hygiene measures and ventilation. Since September, CO2 monitors have been sent out to eligible settings.

All 12- to 17-year-olds are eligible for a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, 12-year-olds and above with specific underlying health conditions, or who live with individuals who are immunosuppressed, are eligible for 2 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. People over 12 who are severely immunosuppressed at the time of their first or second dose should be offered a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Why have NHS Test and Trace assumed contact tracing duties from step 4?

Education and childcare settings have done a brilliant job in identifying contacts over the course of the pandemic, but it is very resource intensive. NHS Test and Trace already manage the contact tracing process for the rest of society and have expertise in supporting people to identify close contacts.

At what point and how might a setting be asked to support with contact tracing?

Settings will not be routinely contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Individual positive cases and/or their parents/carers/legal guardians will instead be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and their close contacts will be traced and asked to follow relevant public health advice.

Contacts in an educational setting will be traced if the positive case specifically identified an individual as having close contact.



In exceptional circumstances, settings may be contacted by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

The [contingency framework](#) includes thresholds for escalation which advise setting leaders on when to seek further public health advice and guidance in response to a number of cases within the setting. If these thresholds are reached and a risk assessment suggests that transmission may be occurring within the setting, local public health teams might advise further contact tracing as part of outbreak management.

How will a child know who a close contact is?

NHS Test and Trace will contact those who test positive – or their parent or legal guardian – to identify close contacts. They will ask a series of specific questions to help the individual understand what is meant by a close contact, making it easier for them to be identified. Being in a setting with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 will not necessarily mean a person is identified as a close contact. We expect there to be a small number of close contacts on average for each case.

How will a setting know if a child, pupil or member of staff has tested positive?

Children and pupils, (or their parent/carer/legal guardian) and staff members who record a positive LFD or PCR test should let their setting know.

Staff, children, or pupils (or the parent/carer/legal guardian) are also required to report the test result via the [Online Reporting System](#) for all negative, void and positive LFD test results.

Should settings inform other parents/carers/legal guardian that a child has tested positive or may be a close contact?

In the event of a person testing positive for COVID-19, settings should consider whether other staff and students need to be informed of a positive case, taking account of factors such as known vulnerability. Settings are best placed to decide how they wish to communicate this information, but should not disclose any information that could result in an individual being identified.

If a setting chooses to communicate information about a positive case, individuals should only be asked to stay at home for Covid-related reasons if:

- they are symptomatic; or
- they have tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return if a positive LFD result is followed by a subsequent confirmatory negative PCR within 2 days)

What does someone who is identified as a close contact have to do?

Fully vaccinated adults and those under-18 and 6 months identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact are strongly advised to take a PCR test. There is no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting that PCR test result, so individuals can continue to attend their education or childcare setting. If an individual is symptomatic, they should stay at home.



Children who are aged under 5 years old and identified as close contacts are advised to take a PCR test only if the positive case is within their own household.

18-year-olds will be given the opportunity to get fully vaccinated before being treated as adults. But 6 months after their 18th birthday, they will be subject to the same rules as adults, therefore if they choose not to get vaccinated, they may need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

Those who have received a positive PCR test result in the last 90 days do not need to have a PCR test unless they develop any new symptoms of COVID-19. This is because it is possible for PCR tests to pick up traces of the virus and return a positive result for some time after a person has ceased to be infectious.

What if settings are asked by parents/carers/legal guardians or NHS Test and Trace to provide details of close contacts?

Settings should not provide any staff, children or pupils' personal information that would breach General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or data protection legislation.

In exceptional circumstances, settings may be contacted by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

In this scenario settings can share proportionate and relevant information as requested by local health protection teams without requiring consent from those individuals. The sharing of information in these exceptional circumstance does not require consent as it is enabled by specific legislation, but to support this, the existing privacy notices should continue to be in place and be easily accessible.

If a child knows their contacts' names but not the details, does NHS Test and Trace disregard those contacts, or ask the setting for details?

As with the process for adults, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case or, depending on the age of the individual, their parent/carer/legal guardian, to identify those who have been in close contact. We expect this to be a small number of individuals for each case on average. Contact tracers are trained in supporting people to identify close contacts and also work with local authorities to help trace contacts where needed.

What if the setting doesn't agree with the child or pupil (and/or their parent/carer/legal guardian) about the individuals identified as a close contact?

NHS Test and Trace are experts in supporting people to identify their close contacts. NHS Test and Trace will work with the person who has tested positive (or their parent or guardian) to identify close contacts, based on a series of questions.

In exceptional cases, settings may take the decision to refuse a pupil if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from



possible infection with COVID-19. The decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Individuals should not attend their setting if:

- they are symptomatic
- they have tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return to the setting if a positive LFD result is followed by a negative PCR within 2 days)

Can I refuse to allow a close contact to attend my setting?

There is no requirement for close contacts who are aged under 18 years and 6 months, fully vaccinated adults or medically exempt from vaccination to self-isolate while awaiting PCR test results. This means that individuals identified as a close contact can attend their setting as usual. However, if they are symptomatic they should remain at home.

In exceptional cases, settings may take the decision to refuse a pupil if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. The decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Individuals should not attend their setting if:

- they are symptomatic
- they have tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return to the setting if a positive LFD result is followed by a negative PCR within 2 days).

What is the legal basis for settings sending pupils home to self-isolate?

As with other diseases, the law allows a setting, in principle, to send particular pupils or groups of pupils home, or forbid them from attending on a temporary basis if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, this is a necessary measure to protect other pupils and staff from serious infectious disease. This power does not depend on the specific regulations or guidance about COVID-19, though public health advice and the broader picture on COVID-19, including the impact of the pandemic on children's education and wellbeing, will be important factors for the setting to take into account when making a decision.

Why is a PCR test not mandatory for close contacts?

In line with wider government policy on testing, taking a PCR test is voluntary. However, we strongly encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

There is no legal requirement for asymptomatic close contacts to self-isolate whilst awaiting PCR test results. However, if an individual is symptomatic, they should stay at home whilst waiting for their result.

Should siblings of positive cases (or household contacts) isolate?



Self-isolation of close contacts is no longer required, meaning that children and pupils can attend their setting unless they have symptoms or a positive test result. We strongly encourage all close contacts to take a PCR test. Public health teams might recommend that some close or household contacts (identified by NHS Test & Trace) take daily lateral flow tests while awaiting the results of a PCR test.

If close contacts don't have to isolate, do they have to wear a face covering while in schools or college? Can settings introduce other control measures?

Face coverings are not required to be worn within settings, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

If a director of public health is supporting a setting to manage a specific outbreak and they judge that additional action should be taken, they might advise the setting to take some of the extra measures described in the contingency framework.

A staff member in my setting has tested positive, what should I do?

Staff member testing positive: Staff members who record a positive PCR test will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and instructed to self-isolate. Staff members are legally required to let their employer know if they test positive and are due to attend work during their self-isolation period.

Individuals who receive a positive confirmatory PCR test will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace who will work with the individual to identify and notify any known close contacts and provide relevant public health advice.

If a staff member receives a positive result from an unassisted LFD test, they should also let their employer know and must book a confirmatory PCR test as soon as possible.

Staff member identified as a close contact: There is no legal requirement for staff to share their vaccine status with their employer, however staff are legally required to tell their employer if they are required to self-isolate.

Role of the setting in identifying a positive case: Where a staff member is identified as having been in close contact with the person who tested positive, they should be advised to take a PCR test. They should also be advised to self-isolate unless one of the following applies:

- They are fully vaccinated
- They are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
- They have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- They can evidence that they are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons



Where a staff member has tested positive for Covid-19, settings do not need to routinely contact the NHS Self Isolation Service Hub to provide details of close contacts. However, to ensure eligible individuals identified as a close contact can access [Test and Trace Support payments](#) you may consider providing staff details to the NHS Self Isolation Hub when:

- a staff member who was in close contact with the person testing positive has indicated they are not exempt from self-isolation, but the person testing positive was unable to provide that person's details to NHS Test and Trace.
- it is particularly difficult for the person testing positive to identify or provide details of some members of staff they were in contact with, for example temporary workers such as supply staff, peripatetic teachers, contractors or ancillary staff.

The self-isolation hub can be contacted by calling 0203 7436715.

In the event of a person testing positive, settings should also consider whether other staff, children or pupils need to be informed of a positive case of covid-19 in the setting, taking account of factors such as known vulnerability. Settings are best placed to decide how they wish to communicate this information but when informing individuals of a positive case, settings should not disclose any information that could result in an individual being identified.

In exceptional circumstances, settings may be contacted by NHS Test and Trace if deemed necessary by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

What about responding to a positive case in specialist SEND settings?

SEND settings should follow the guidance for [Special schools and other specialist settings: coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

In line with other settings fully vaccinated adults and those under-18 and 6 months identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact are strongly advised to take a PCR test. There is no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting that PCR test result and so individuals can continue to attend their education or childcare setting. If an individual is symptomatic, they should stay at home.

Settings will need to conduct their own health and safety risk assessments, taking into account the level of risk, known vulnerabilities and specific needs of students and staff within the setting. A student, their parent/carer or staff members may wish to take additional protective measures whilst awaiting test results - where this is practical. Any decision to take additional precautions should be carefully considered based on the specific circumstances of each individual and their needs. Any decision to take additional precautions should be a collaborative decision taken between all relevant parties i.e. the student, their parent/carer and the setting and should always be in the best interests of the individual.



Those identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 but not required to self-isolate, can help protect others by following the guidance on [how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#). Additionally, Public Health England (PHE) [Stay at home guidance](#) details some further actions that close contacts may wish to take in addition to getting a PCR test.

For those who work in a health or social care setting and have been identified as a close contact and are exempt from self-isolation, there is [additional guidance](#) that should be followed to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 in these settings.

What about young people and adults over the age of 18 years 6 months who are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons?

Those who are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons are exempt from the requirement to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case.

What happens when a child or pupil cannot attend their setting because they are reliant on a household member who is self-isolating to transport them?

Parents/carers/ legal guardians should make alternative arrangements wherever possible to ensure that the student can continue to attend their setting. Where they cannot do so, education settings and local authorities may help families to agree alternative travel arrangements which mean that a pupil or student who is not required to self-isolate is able to continue to attend.

Setting leaders have discretion to grant leaves of absence in exceptional circumstances. If a leave of absence is granted, the setting should provide remote education to the affected pupil or student (where applicable).

For schools, any absence must be recorded in the setting's attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.

What should settings do if they think they might have an outbreak?

The DfE [contingency framework](#) guidance sets out the measures that all education and childcare settings should have in place to manage transmission of COVID-19 day to day.

NHS Test and Trace App

Who is the NHS COVID-19 App for?

The NHS COVID-19 app remains an important part of the country's COVID-19 response. The app complements the overall Test and Trace service by automating some aspects of contact tracing. The app is intended for use by individuals aged 16 and over and may be used staff in education settings if they choose to do so.

I have been identified as a close contact by the App, do I need to self-isolate?



Fully vaccinated adults and individuals under the age of 18 and 6 months in England are no longer legally required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact. They should take a PCR test and follow relevant public health advice. The app has been updated to reflect this guidance.

I've been notified by the App, what do I do?

The NHS Covid-19 App complements rather than replaces existing contact tracing processes.

If an app user receives a notification that they have been in close contact with somebody who has tested positive, it is important they follow the advice they are given. Fully vaccinated adults and individuals under the age of 18 and 6 months in England are no longer legally required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact. They should take a PCR test and follow relevant public health advice.